

Message Text

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SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO AFL-CIO CONVENTION

REF: ROME 19493 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THE THREE ITALIAN PARTICIPANTS AT THE
AFL-CIO CONVENTION IN LOS ANGELES WERE PREPONDERENTLY
PLEASED WITH THEIR EXPERIENCE. REPORTING ON CONVENTION
EVENTS IN THE PRINT MEDIA WAS SPARSE BUT CRITICAL. ALL
REPORTS INVEIGHED AGAINST AMERICAN LABOR'S PROTECTIONIST
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TENDENCIES, ASSERTED THAT THE LABOR MOVEMENT IS AT ODDS
WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AND DESCRIBED
GEORGE MEANY IN NEGATIVE TERMS. END SUMMARY.

2. COVERAGE IN THE ITALIAN MEDIA OF THE AFL-CIO
NATIONAL CONVENTION WAS SPORADIC AND TENDENTIOUS.
ACTUALLY, THERE WAS AS MUCH DISCUSSION IN THE PRESS

PRIOR TO THE CONVENTION, DERIVING FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH SURROUNDED THE VISIT TO ROME IN LATE NOVEMBER OF THE AFL-CIO'S INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, IRVING BROWN (REFTEL). THE PRE-CONVENTION REPORTS CENTERED ON ACCOUNTS OF WHO HAD BEEN INVITED (MACARIO, SARTORI AND MARINI OF CISL; ULTIMATELY, VANNI OF UIL AS WELL) AND THOSE NOT INVITED, NOTABLY UIL SECRETARY GENERAL BENVENUTO. THE PRESS CONSENSUS WAS THAT, IN INVITING PRIMARILY ITS FRIENDS RATHER THAN THE LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AS SUCH, THE AFL-CIO WAS SEEKING TO "INTERFERE" IN ITALIAN LABOR MATTERS.

3. THE ACTUAL PARTICIPANTS AT THE CONGRESS--SARTORI, VANNI AND CISL NATIONAL SECRETARY ROBERTO ROMEI, REPRESENTING CISL SECRETARY GENERAL MACARIO AS THE "OFFICIAL" CISL DELEGATE -- WERE GENERALLY PLEASED, BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, WITH THEIR EXPERIENCE IN LOS ANGELES. ON HIS RETURN, SARTORI PUBLICALLY STATED THAT "THE AMERICAN LABOR ORGANIZATION, AND IN PARTICULAR PRESIDENT GEORGE MEANY, ... ARE JUSTLY CONCERNED WITH ITALIAN LABOR SITUATION, ABOVE ALL WITH THE ATTEMPTS OF THE COMMUNIST COMPONENT TO HEGEMONIZE THE ENTIRE MOVEMENT". VANNI REPORTED THAT THE AMERICAN UNIONS ARE FORMULATING A STRATEGY FOR OVERCOMING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS. "MANY OF THE PROPOSED MEASURES ... ARE VERY SIMILAR TO THOSE PROPOSED IN MANY OTHER COUNTRIES, INCLUDING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ITALY", VANNI STATED. ROMEI RELEASED THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: "THE CONVENTION UNFOLDED IN A VERY CONCRETE ATMOSPHERE, WHERE THE POSITIVE AND CONSTANT NEED FOR THE DEFENSE OF LIBERTY AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS IN THE ENTIRE WORLD WAS PLACED IN RELIEF. THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY AFL-CIO PRESIDENT MEANY WAS PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT; IT DID NOT LACK FOR APPROPRIATE OBSERVATIONS HIGHLIGHTING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF THE WEST AND OF ALL THE INDUSTRIALIZED NATION," ROMEI'S STATEMENT CONCLUDED.

4. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, ONLY TWO NEGATIVE OBSERVATIONS WERE OFFERED. BOTH SARTORI AND VANNI WERE A BIT CHAGRINED TO FIND THE ITALIANS SEATED AMONGST OTHER MEDITERRANEAN DELEGATES, RATHER THAN AMONG THOSE FROM MAJOR WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. ROMEI SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY INDICATED THAT HE AT TIMES FELT THAT, IN CERTAIN CONVENTION ARRANGEMENTS, THE AFL-CIO WAS SEEKING TO SNUB HIM AND CISL LEADERSHIP WHILE SHOWING FAVOR TO SARTORI. HOWEVER, ALL THREE OF THE PARTICIPANTS WERE PREDOMINANTLY POSITIVE IN THEIR EVALUATIONS, BOTH OF THE CONVENTION AND OF THE GENERAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR VISIT IN THE UNITED STATES.

5. NEWSPAPER COVERAGE WAS LIMITED TO SINGLE ARTICLES IN FIVE OR SIX OF THE LEADING ITALIAN DAILIES. THESE ARTICLES HAD THREEE INGREDIENTS IN COMMON: CRITICISM OF THE PROTECTIONIST MEASURES BEING ADVOCATED IN VARIOUS CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS; ASSERTIONS OF MAJOR DIVERGENCES BETWEEN PRESIDENT CARTER AND THE AFL-CIO, BASED ON THE PRESIDENT'S ABSENCE FROM THE CONVENTION; AND SNIDE REFERENCES TO GEORGE MEANY, ACCUSED OF BEING OLD, REACTIONARY AND DICTATORIAL. ODDLY, THE MOST BALANCED ARTICLE WAS CARRIED IN THE COMMUNIST DAILY, L'UNITA , WHOSE U.S. CORRESPONDENT ALBERTO JACOVIELLO, HAS BEEN CARRYING ON SOMETHING OF AN UNREQUITED LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE UNITED STATES. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THOUGH THE COMMON ELEMENTS NOTED ABOVE WERE NOT ABSENT FROM JACOVIELLO'S REPORT, ALBIET IN Milder FORM, HE DID REVEAL A FAMILIARITY AND APPRECIATION OF THE AFL-CIO WHICH THE OTHER ARTICLES LACKED. THUS, JACOVIELLO DESCRIBED AT LENGTH THE AFL-CIO'S STRENGTH IN RALLYING VOTERS TO ELECT FAVORABLE CANDIDATES, AND ITS CLOUT IN THE LOBBIES AND HALLS OF CONGRESS.

6. COMMENT. THE ONT THING THAT EUROPEAN LIBERALS THINK THEY KNOW FOR SURE ABOUT THE AMERICAN LABOR MVEMENT IS THAT GEOGRGE MEANY IS A REACTIONARY. THIS ASSUMPTION, WIDELY SHARED IN ITALY, SEEMS NEVER TO BE REINSPECTED FOR ITS VALIDITY. IT IS DOUBTLESS FED BY MEANY'S BRUSQUE AND UNCOMPROMISING DENUNCIATION OF PRACTICING COMMUNISM (POULARLY AND PEJORATIVELY KNOWN HERE AS "VISCERAL" ANTI-COMMUNISM). AT A TIME WHEN MANY ARE HOPING TO DISCOVER THAT, AGAINST THE MASSIVE CONTRARY EVIDENCE OFFERED BY HISTORY AND THE HEATED DENIALS OF THE PCI ITSELF, ITALIAN COMMUNISM WILL PROVE TO BE THE EQUIVALENT, SAY, OF GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, MEANY'S ATTITUDE IS UNWELCOME. THE AFL-CIO APPLIES A SIMPLE TEST TO THE LIBERTARIAN ASSERTIONS OF ANY TRADE UNIONIST: ARE YOU FOR OR AGAINST COMMUNISM? MOST ITALIAN LABOR LEADERS TEND TO FLUNK THE TEST BY GIVING LONG ANSWERS. GARDNER

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